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Chair: Mr. Tafrov ..... (Bulgaria)
later: Ms. Dagher (Vice-Chair) ..... (Lebanon)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 62: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (A/68/12 (Part I), A/68/12 (Part II), A/68/12/Add.1 and A/68/341)

1. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), introducing his report (A/68/12 (Part I), A/68/12 (Part II), A/68/12/Add.1), said that the decennial Strategic Review came at an appropriate time, as the number of persons of concern to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had doubled in the last ten years and refugees were crossing borders at the highest rate in nearly two decades. By the end of 2013, some two million people across the world would have been forced to flee their country — the highest number in any year since the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Since 2010, there had been a quick succession of large-scale displacement emergencies, from Libya and Côte d'Ivoire to Somalia and Mali. Still dealing with the hundreds of thousands of refugees from those crises, UNHCR was currently also confronted with an outflow of about 1.7 million Syrians who had fled their country as a result of the tragedy there. UNHCR was working with partners to respond, but its limits were being severely tested by the combination of an emergency unparalleled in the recent past and the persistence of all the other crises worldwide. Significant reforms and investments had been made since the first Strategic Review to enable his Office to fulfil its increasingly complex mandate. While there continued to be areas for improvement, several factors had been central in boosting effectiveness under growing pressure.

2. The first and most important factor in ensuring the effective protection of refugees was the generosity of host countries and local communities. Most Governments affected by recent displacement had provided refugees safety, shelter, access to schools and health care, and even in some cases, permission to work. The burden of hosting refugees was distributed unevenly and the gap was widening: more than 80 per cent of refugees were currently hosted by developing countries. Sustaining the international refugee protection system would require enhanced support to host countries and more serious efforts by the international community towards meaningful solidarity and burden-sharing. In response to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic and the enormous impact of 2.2 million registered refugees on the economies and societies of neighbouring countries the High-Level Segment of the sixty-fourth session of the Executive Committee had been devoted to solidarity and burden-sharing with countries hosting Syrian refugees.

3. The second factor was strong financial support from donors. Voluntary funding was vital to UNHCR and had more than doubled, reaching a record $2.3 billion in 2012. The needs-based budget, introduced in 2010, together with the Global Strategic Priorities and the Results Framework had proven an important advocacy tool for showing the real, human consequences of funding short-falls and for broadening the donor base. Heavy investment in private sector fundraising had increased support from $22 million in 2003 to an expected $170 million in 2013. Nevertheless, significant funding gaps remained and achieving a balance between current emergencies and persistent humanitarian needs elsewhere posed a major challenge. While some countries had been making laudable efforts to use additional budget sources for the Syrian Arab Republic, so as to minimize the negative impact on other operations, including those where there were opportunities to bring protracted situations to a close, several regions had been struggling with a decrease in earmarked funding in 2013.

4. UNHCR had invested heavily in reinforcing long-standing partnerships, forging new ones and trying to provide better support to its partners, both in refugee emergencies and in cluster situations. It spent twice as much through its partners than it had done in 2006, working with over 900 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) world-wide and with an increased percentage of local organizations. There were key partnerships with United Nations bodies, including the World Food Programme, where there were new avenues for cooperation through cash and voucher-based assistance and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), with strengthened collaboration on education, child protection and water and sanitation and efforts to improve the effectiveness and predictability of cooperation in emergencies. UNHCR was firmly committed to the implementation of the Transformative Agenda. Adjustments to internal procedures in that context had also provided an opportunity to review and improve leadership approaches and coordination mechanisms for refugee operations.

5. Partnership efforts in the region were focused on merging humanitarian and development tracks into a comprehensive approach to benefit both refugees and their host communities. UNHCR was expanding its work with partners, national institutions and community-based organizations to explore new approaches to displacement in out-of-camp settings. That required better outreach and communication and more support to national services to ensure that refugees did not simply become invisible in urban areas and add to the struggles of local populations, themselves often at risk. More integrated approaches that anchored the refugee response within the broader framework of national and local development efforts must be pursued so as not to divert scarce development resources to the refugee response or to use even more limited humanitarian funding to promote development objectives, but rather to align and create synergies between the two.

6. As a result of internal reform, between 2006 and 2012, headquarters costs and staff costs had dropped significantly. Protection work was necessarily labour-intensive and while UNHCR operations had more than doubled in size since 2006, staffing had increased by 13 per cent globally, with a reduction of 32 per cent in Geneva. Through increased productivity and the parallel decrease in relative structural costs, UNHCR was directing more resources to protection, assistance and solutions for the people it served. In 2012, nearly all unearmarked funds were used in the field. That provided vital flexibility to ensure uninterrupted program delivery for forgotten situations, such as in South Sudan where $65 million of unearmarked funding was being used to complement the clearly insufficient earmarked funding for that situation.

7. UNHCR had also begun to strengthen the delivery of its mandate in two core operational priorities: emergency response and protection capacity. Improved deployment mechanisms and global supply management had markedly increased the 72-hour emergency response capacity and protection staff had doubled across the globe since 2003. There had also been a heightened emphasis on internal oversight and accountability to bolster its financial management and programme oversight capability, professionalize the approach to risk management, and strengthen overall accountability. The Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, created in 2012, provided valuable advice and support in that effort. Efforts to modernize human resource management continued, with fast-track assignments in emergency operations, new recruitment programs for entry-level personnel as well as specialist expertise and training for staff, the affiliate workforce and external partners through the Global Learning Centre in Budapest.

8. Innovation was a crucial tool to do more with less while taking advantage of the creativity offered by the private sector, staff and refugees themselves and the new opportunities generated by technological advances. The dedication and professionalism of UNHCR staff, some 40 per cent of whom served in non-family duty stations, must also be recognized. Too often they served at a bitter price: since the organization had been established, 43 lives had been lost in the line of duty. To minimize the risks, the autonomy of humanitarian space must be preserved at all costs, which meant strictly maintaining and clearly communicating the commitment to the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence.

9. Turning to protection, he said that there had been several important advances, most notably through increased international cooperation. That had been clearly illustrated during the commemorations of the sixtieth anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, when more than 100 States had made pledges to strengthen their national policies and legislation for protection and for durable solutions.

10. Visible progress had been made in statelessness. Since the inception of the awareness campaign in 2010, there had been 30 new accessions to the two relevant conventions. In addition, many countries had taken steps to reform their nationality laws to reduce statelessness. Some 4 million people had been able to acquire a nationality as a result of legislative and policy changes over the past ten years but much work remained to be done. The sixtieth anniversary of the draft Convention on the Elimination of Future Statelessness of 1954 would be an occasion to focus on the everyday impact of statelessness on an estimated 10 million people worldwide and to make meaningful progress towards the ambitious goal of eradicating statelessness within the next decade.

11. A second major emphasis of protection work over the decade had been to strengthen fundamental accountability to the people UNHCR was mandated to protect. Initial efforts to mainstream age and gender

awareness had since grown into an age, gender and diversity approach that fundamentally shaped the way persons of concern participated in the design and delivery of programmes worldwide and recognized the unique needs and resources of each person.

12. The increased attention to the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence had stemmed from that approach. Since the 2011 launch of the Updated Strategy against such violence, 20 large operations had developed and implemented country-specific strategies adapted to their local context. In 2013, UNHCR had strongly invested in its response to such violence, particularly in emergencies related to Syrian and Malian refugees. A number of special projects, which included measures ranging from psychosocial support and legal counselling to self-defence training and self-reliance opportunities, had expanded existing services for survivors and supported critical investments in many operations across the world. Most recently, UNHCR had placed a particular institutional emphasis on improving monitoring and evaluation as well as sexual and gender-based violence knowledge and data management.

13. The protection of internally displaced persons had been another focus of the past decade, with fundamental changes in the way humanitarian agencies responded to their needs. The humanitarian reform initiated in 2005 had enhanced predictability in operational programmes while reaffirming the primary responsibility of States to protect the internally displaced. Despite important normative advances, such as the adoption of the African Union Kampala Convention, international attention in that area had dwindled. Fifteen years after the drafting of Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, humanitarian actors found it increasingly difficult to mobilize funding for the protection of those displaced within the borders of their own countries. The 2013 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges would look at persistent gaps and possible solutions for the protection of internally displaced persons.

14. Highlighting the work of UNHCR at the intersection of asylum and migration, he noted that as more and more refugees and asylum seekers travelled in mixed migratory flows, safeguards to identify them and ensure their access to appropriate protection mechanisms had become increasingly important, both at national and regional levels. The risks and dangers faced by refugees, asylum seekers and others on the move, forced to rely on the services of smugglers, underlined the urgency of those efforts. As hundreds of people seeking protection lost their lives at sea year after year, the need for coordinated, protection-minded regional responses to address such mixed flows became ever more urgent. A global pact of solidarity, based on burden-sharing and common but differentiated responsibilities of the affected States was needed. There was something fundamentally wrong when so many people must die while trying to reach protection. States must step up efforts to come together and effectively crack down on smugglers and traffickers, while also finding more humane ways to care for the victims. People fleeing violence and persecution should be able to access protection without having to risk their lives and to suffer brutal violations of their human rights.

15. As forced displacement evolved in an increasingly complex global environment, the institution of asylum was coming under growing pressure, including in some countries in the developed world. The safety of refugees and asylum seekers was often hampered by border management policies lacking safeguards for people in need of international protection. Substandard reception arrangements, the disproportionate use of detention, and the absence of adequate burden-sharing among States were major concerns. Furthermore, not all societies were doing enough to fight intolerance, racism and racially-motivated violence, which posed serious risks to the safety of refugees and other foreigners. Those threats to international protection would require closer attention from States in the decade ahead.

16. Finding durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons remained the ultimate goal of the work of UNHCR, and its biggest challenge in a global environment marked by many protracted conflicts. While over 7 million refugees had been able to voluntarily repatriate since 2003, in recent years, the number of new refugees had in fact exceeded the number of people who had been able to leave displacement. The effort to seek solutions must be ongoing, implemented from the start of an emergency and throughout the duration of displacement.

17. There was encouraging progress in resettlement: over 800,000 people had benefited since 2003, the number of resettlement countries had risen from 16 to 27 and annual resettlement submissions had doubled. However, global capacity continued to fall short of

existing needs. UNHCR was focusing increasingly on comprehensive strategies, which promoted return, resettlement and local integration, where possible. Progress had recently been made with Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees, with over 300,000 able to return home in 2012 and the local integration of many others. The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees was another noteworthy example of a broader approach, fostering interventions in Afghanistan to help create conducive conditions for return and projects in the neighbouring countries to assist communities that generously continued to host some 2.5 million refugees. Many other partnership efforts, including the Transitional Solutions Initiative, were increasingly geared towards reducing the risk of prolonged aid dependency.

18. The use of legal migratory frameworks could offer refugees in protracted situations and without proper status an alternative path if traditional durable solutions were unavailable, provided that adequate protection safeguards were in place. The current environment — marked by multiplying conflicts, population growth, rapid urbanization, food insecurity and the effects of climate change — was likely to result in a further dramatic rise in humanitarian needs in the years to come.

19. One key factor that must underpin the UNHCR response in the decade ahead included continued close collaboration with States, who contributed most to refugee protection and to the achievement of durable solutions. Furthermore, efforts to integrate a solutions approach into humanitarian programmes from the outset of a refugee crisis must take a broader perspective to address the root causes of flight and to prevent displacement from occurring in the first place. There was also growing challenge .o maintaining space for asylum and protection, given the increasing imbalance in the burden of hosting refugees between rich and poor countries. Enhanced international solidarity with refugee-hosting States and communities must therefore be a key pillar of any global response to forced displacement.

20. One of the essential conditions for durable solutions was a stronger link between humanitarian relief and longer-term development programmes. Work was under way in that regard with multilateral and other partners in some countries bordering the Syrian Arab Republic and provided a key learning opportunity for the international community. That was among the "transformative shifts" that would need to be at the centre of the discussion about the post-2015 agenda for integrated and sustainable development. As UNHCR continued to enhance its partnerships and coordination mechanisms, ensuring the integrity of its uniquely strong legal mandate would remain of key importance to the success of its work.

21. **Ms. Mørch Smith** (Norway) said that Norway was deeply concerned by the serious protection challenges in several current crises. Amid a worrying trend of a lack of respect for basic international humanitarian law, there were widespread attacks targeting civilian populations. Civilians bore the brunt of many forms of violence not only in the Syrian crisis, but also in conflicts in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, which attracted far less international attention. It was urgent to provide timely humanitarian access because millions of people were unable to receive lifesaving assistance and protection when UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies were denied access. She asked what was needed in order to enhance the protection of children and adults affected by complex humanitarian crises such as the one in the Syrian Arab Republic and what more UNHCR could do to protect women and girls from sexual violence.

22. **Mr. Ja'afari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that while his delegation appreciated the statements made by States and organizations in the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees regarding their commitment to solving the Syrian crisis, it called on them to fulfil the pledges they had made over a year earlier to implement the humanitarian response plan effectively.

23. The average amount of aid allocated to each Syrian refugee in neighbouring countries was double that allocated to internally displaced Syrians, even though, according to United Nations estimates, the number of Syrians displaced within the country vastly outnumbered those outside the country, and relatively few of the refugees abroad were living in refugee camps. UNHCR should re evaluate the current unjust distribution of resources.

24. According to international and non-governmental organizations, there was a total lack of security in Syrian refugee camps in neighbouring countries. Theft, rape, child labour, forced marriage, sexual exploitation of minor females and recruitment by armed terrorist

groups was increasing, facilitated by camp authorities and local non-governmental organizations and fuelled by petrodollars from certain Gulf States. He wished to learn what UNHCR could do to protect Syrians from such crimes. He trusted that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees would call on States supporting armed groups to stop meddling in Syrian internal affairs; such interference was allowing certain political powers to exploit the situation to put political pressure on the Government to renounce its sovereign rights.

25. **Ms. Baxewanos** (Liechtenstein) said that her country attached great value to the critical role of UNHCR in protecting the most vulnerable groups and was deeply concerned by the significant increase in the number of newly displaced refugees and internally displaced persons, as indicated in the report. Prevention and early conflict resolution must be central to common efforts; where they failed, it was vital to provide solutions that were safe, durable and fully guaranteed the human rights of displaced persons. The principle of non-refoulement must be fully respected. Her delegation would appreciate hearing views and strategies on how best to achieve that, particularly in the light of mixed migration, where it was difficult to discern refugees from other groups.

26. **Mr. Alemu** (Ethiopia) expressed appreciation for the support provided by UNHCR to his country in its efforts to host refugees in compliance with its international obligations. Ethiopia was fully aware of the many difficulties of resettlement, including gaps between requests from refugees and the response from countries willing to accept them and the decision-making process regarding eligible refugees and where they resettled. He would therefore appreciate the High Commissioner's comments on that issue given the need to improve understanding between refugees and transit countries. In addition, given the enormous task of providing care for millions of refugees as well as non-food items for emergency humanitarian relief, partnership between UNHCR and other agencies, Government bodies and civil society was obviously indispensable. He asked how the Office could further strengthen its partnership with other United Nations organs under the "Delivering as One" initiative.

27. **Ms. Mballa Eyenga** (Cameroon) said that the reports had revealed the challenges faced by the international community and UNHCR as the economic crisis and new armed conflicts increased the flow of migrants. She expressed appreciation for the work and engagement of the High Commissioner and of donors that had contributed to the execution of his mandate, but reminded Member States of the principle of shared responsibility in the burden of managing refugees. Solidarity was the only solution, for in a globalized community, the problems faced by one State had repercussions on all. With regard to the priorities for the next 10 years mentioned in the second part of the report (A/68/12 (Part II)), she would like to hear suggestions as to what Member States could do to ensure that those priorities were implemented.

28. **Mr. El Mkhantar** (Morocco), commending the spirit of sacrifice of UNHCR staff in the exercise of their functions, said that it was acknowledged that the needs of refugees must be assessed based on quantifiable data. However, refugees often lived in deplorable conditions, without documents and facing unequal access to basic social services. In the framework of UNHCR cooperation with the World Food Programme, he asked what efforts were under way, in cooperation with host countries, to quantify the needs of refugees. His delegation welcomed cooperation with UNICEF in the area of education and he asked what challenges UNHCR faced in the implementation of education programmes, particularly with regard to ensuring their sustainability so that refugees could continued to enjoy the fundamental right to education. On the question of visibility of refugees in urban areas, he asked what constraints there were to increasing that visibility and how the freedom of movement of refugees might be ensured. Lastly, he asked what steps were taken to ensure the protection of refugees given the threats to their life and safety, particularly with the presence of mafia and criminal groups and the incidence of drug and arms trafficking in refugee camps.

29. **Ms. Gae Luna** (Indonesia) reiterated her country's commitment to ensuring coordinated responses to the irregular movement of people, as evidenced by the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime. Under the Process, a Regional Support Office would be established in Bangkok, Thailand to administer a regional cooperation framework to reduce irregular movement of people in the Asia-Pacific region and would serve as a central point for information-sharing on refugee protection and international migration. Given its success in the

voluntary return and improved management of irregular migrants, the Process could serve as a good model for other regional mechanisms, even though there was room for further discussion on cooperation involving countries of origin, transit and destination. She asked how Member States should improve cooperation to address the many challenges related to irregular migration in a comprehensive manner.

30. **Mr. Giorgio** (Eritrea) recalled that, addressing the Committee in 2005, the High Commissioner had highlighted certain challenges and stressed the importance of finding lasting solutions for refugees and displaced persons. Eight years on, how did he view the progress towards the realization of that vision? In addition, given the increasing trend of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers falling victim to criminal activity, violence and abuse, he asked what UNHCR could do to enhance the protection of assistance to those vulnerable groups.

31. **Ms. Mwaura** (Kenya) said that over the past forty years, Kenya had been receiving increasing numbers of refugees, which posed a number of political, social and security-related challenges. She asked how best to address the security problems created by social conflict between communities often provoked by competition for resources. Also of concern were criminal infiltration in refugee camps and the lack of control over the number of refugees arriving in the country. While Kenya remained committed to providing refuge and recognized the paramount importance of security, the burden needed to be shared and global resettlement capacity increased. She inquired about factors that could be used to determine when refugees could be repatriated.

32. **Mr. Rahman** (Bangladesh) said that while it recognized the wide range of important functions and objectives of each United Nations agency, UNHCR appeared to be paying a great deal of attention to areas outside its primary mandate. Global refugee numbers had risen steeply in recent years and the scope of its work had broadened. He wondered whether a new agency was needed to absorb some of the additional work, as all refugees must be protected regardless of their location or nationality. Furthermore, the significant numbers of refugees welcomed by developing countries should be better acknowledged and reflected in reports.

33. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he shared the concerns expressed by the representative of Norway over increasing violations of international humanitarian law and difficulties in providing humanitarian aid to civilians trapped in conflict zones. Unfortunately, the main problem lay in gaining access to those persons and detecting their needs. States and the international community were all responsible for upholding international law in areas of conflict. Protecting women and children was a top priority of UNHCR; combined action was needed to tackle sexual and gender-based violence, eliminate child labour and prevent recruitment by armed groups as well as empowering women, providing education and helping children suffering from trauma. Staff in international organizations should be provided with additional training on gender-related cultural sensitivities. UNHCR had used savings from other areas to launch a number of specific initiatives, in collaboration with States, to address the central priorities of education and sexual and gender-based violence.

34. He acknowledged that more financial support was provided to Syrian refugees outside the country than to those displaced internally, even though the latter were greater in number, and agreed that the distribution of resources should be re evaluated. At the same time, significant obstacles remained in gaining access to internally displaced persons in certain areas of the country. The parties involved in and affected by the conflict should work on building mutual confidence so that humanitarian aid could be delivered to those most in need. He commended the generosity of the Syrian Arab Republic, which had welcomed large numbers of Iraqi and Palestinian refugees over the years. Now that the Syrian people were regrettably suffering their own humanitarian crisis, they deserved international solidarity in return. UNHCR had been working hard in collaboration with Turkey and Jordan to prevent crime and recruitment to armed groups in Syrian refugee camps and remained firmly committed to security and civilian protection.

35. He agreed with the representative of Liechtenstein on the importance of addressing issues related to mixed migratory flows. In view of the recent tragedy in the Mediterranean Sea, UNHCR had submitted an action plan to the European Commission including proposals to increase capacity to rescue at sea, clarify judicial mechanisms, improve reception

facilities, integration and burden-sharing, provide protection in countries of transit and promote investment in countries of origin. Increased international cooperation and solidarity were essential to prevent the exploitation of vulnerable persons by smugglers and traffickers. While States had the right to protect their borders, they had an equal duty to protect persons arriving at those borders.

36. He commended Ethiopia's generous open-door policy for refugees, which was an excellent example of international burden-sharing and solidarity. As for partnerships, they could be productive, as long as they involved contributing resources rather than diverting them from other development objectives. While in recent years, resettlement capacity had been increased and countries of resettlement had been adopting a less discriminatory approach, more progress was needed in that area. Countries of transit should also receive better assistance to protect refugees and tackle smuggling and trafficking.

37. He acknowledged the important role that Cameroon had always played in the protection of refugees, notably those from the Central African Republic and Nigeria, and agreed on the need to improve burden-sharing for resettlement and provide better support for communities that received large numbers of refugees.

38. He welcomed the decision of the King of Morocco to create an institutional, legislative and organizational structure to enable the country to become a country of asylum based on best practices. UNHCR and the World Food Programme must work together to improve monitoring by conducting censuses of refugees and providing vouchers and money in place of foodstuffs, which would improve evaluation of and response to refugees' needs. Education was a key challenge, particularly since among the global refugee population only two thirds of primary-school-age children and one third of secondary-school-age children were attending school. Access to quality education in refugee camps was insufficient and places were limited in schools in urban areas. UNHCR had approved a new education strategy and was establishing new partnerships with the Qatar Foundation, UNICEF, Save the Children, UNESCO and other international organizations that focused on education as a priority. Although each State had the right to decide on its own policies, it was the belief of UNHCR that the movement of refugees should not be restricted to refugee camps.

39. He expressed satisfaction at the recent improvement in cooperation between the Government of Indonesia and UNHCR, both as part of the Bali process and in the context of recent Government initiatives. While regional cooperation was crucial, it should be used to promote regional solidarity, not weaken refugee protection.

40. In response to the comments of the representative of Eritrea, he expressed great concern that many migrants were being targeted by criminal gangs involved in smuggling, organ trafficking, hijacking and various human rights violations. Increased international cooperation was needed to prosecute criminals and protect their victims. While recent cooperation with the Government of Sudan had achieved some progress, enormous challenges remained, particularly as some criminal organizations had greater financial capacity than the countries trying to combat them. UNHCR was continuing to work on solutions such as resettlement and voluntary repatriation in addition to improving living conditions; it encouraged practices such as that of the Government of Sudan, which had recently issued 30,000 work permits to refugees.

41. He agreed that Kenya formed a key pillar in the international refugee protection system and admitted that not enough had been done to support the communities surrounding Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps. UNHCR was working to improve the situation in the area without diverting too many of the country's development resources. He highlighted the new trilateral agreement on voluntary repatriation between UNHCR and the Governments of Kenya and Somalia and the planned programme of action to improve security and sustainable investment in certain key areas of Somalia. He commended Kenya's policy of non-refoulement and remained eager to enhance cooperation with the Kenyan Government.

42. While UNHCR did work with groups of people outside its official mandate, such work formed part of vital international humanitarian cooperation and in no way undermined the exercise of its core mandate of helping refugees and stateless persons, to which the overwhelming majority of its resources was devoted. UNHCR could not exercise its mandate, especially to help internally displaced persons, without full support

from States. Effective burden-sharing and solidarity mechanisms and enhanced support for States were crucial factors in improving international refugee protection.

43. **Mr. Mwanza** (Zambia), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that insecurity resulting from war, genocide, torture and persecution was causing people all over the world to flee their homes, threatening international peace and stability, damaging national economies and obstructing the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Conflict in Southern Africa and neighbouring regions had led millions of people to seek refuge and asylum in SADC member States; mechanisms were needed to resolve such conflicts and explore their root causes. SADC member States reaffirmed their commitment to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, to the principle of non-refoulement and to international standards for refugee protection, drawing attention to the memorandum of understanding signed by SADC and UNHCR in 1996 governing refugee management in the region.

44. Recent efforts by SADC member States to resolve long-standing conflicts and consolidate peace, national reconciliation and democratic governance had produced positive results; the region had become safer, allowing many refugees to return to their countries. Despite such progress, the SADC countries continued to receive refugees in large numbers and called on all partners to help achieve lasting peace, particularly in the Great Lakes region.

45. It was essential to strike a balance between the potential security risks associated with hosting refugees and the benefits of enhanced regional integration. In that regard, SADC member States were bound by international agreements to cooperate with UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on matters relating to refugees. Also, the Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security of the SADC outlined ways to improve social integration of refugees and promote peace in the region.

46. The SADC member States would continue to use preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution to address the root causes of refugee movement and internal displacement. While they expressed gratitude for the assistance provided by the international community, particularly by UNHCR, they called for more help to host Governments in fulfilling their responsibilities in line with international law while also taking national security and social and economic interests into account.

47. Speaking on behalf of Zambia, he said that the country had responded to the call of UNHCR to provide alternative arrangements to refugees whose legal stay had expired, based on criteria established jointly by Zambia and the countries of origin. Under that system, refugees would be assisted either to return home voluntarily or integrate into Zambian society. The Government would continue working with relevant stakeholders to ensure full respect for refugees' rights.

48. **Mr. Vrailas** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that new displacement resulting from violence, persecution and conflict had reached staggering numbers in 2013, making the role of UNHCR more critical than ever. He commended the swift response of UNHCR to a number of simultaneous crises and called for increased efforts to help persons concerned by its mandate, underlining the European Union's unwavering solidarity despite its own ongoing economic crisis.

49. Current resources were insufficient to provide all of the world's refugees with the protection and assistance guaranteed to them by international law. Refugees were often seen as security threats or a drain on economies and the environment; efforts to address such concerns must not result in a restriction of refugees' rights and they must be protected in particular against forced return. To preserve the institution of asylum, Governments must respect the principle of non-refoulement, guarantee access to asylum and humane reception conditions and increase international cooperation.

50. He encouraged UNHCR to continue implementing comprehensive regional protection strategies and investing in its institutionalized response to protect refugees in mixed migration flows, refugee women, refugee children, urban refugees and stateless persons. He also called for the UNHCR protection guidelines, strategies and the Age, Gender and

Diversity (AGD) approach to be more speedily and consistently implemented.

51. Closer cooperation between humanitarian and development actors was required to find more durable solutions for refugees and enable them to become more self-sufficient. The creation of a new Solutions Steering Group was a positive development.

52. While the increase in the global refugee population was of great concern, it was also crucial to address the needs of rising numbers of internally displaced persons, who did not benefit from the same international protection as refugees; the European Union looked forward to discussing such issues at the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in Geneva in December 2013.

53. The UNHCR decennial strategic review, published earlier that year, had revealed that the number of persons of concern to the organization had almost doubled over the previous 10 years. Accordingly, its budget had increased manifold in the same period, with substantial contributions from the European Union and its Member States; they would continue their support and encourage others to contribute funds, as more donors would be needed over the years. At the same time, in accordance with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Transformative Agenda, UNHCR should strive to use resources more efficiently and invest in operational partnerships with other organizations, which were essential not only during emergencies but also in the development of transition strategies and in the search for durable solutions.

54. After 10 years of dedicated work, the European Union and its Member States had recently completed the legislative framework for the creation of a common European asylum system based on the 1951 Refugee Convention; they were committed to its effective implementation.

55. Faced with fast global developments and increasing emergencies, UNHCR must tackle displacement issues efficiently by forming strong partnerships with national, international, multilateral, governmental and civil society actors. The European Union remained committed to improving asylum systems and providing more assistance to refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable persons.

56. **Mr. Zhang** Guixuan (China) said that while international efforts had resulted in progress in the protection of refugees and response to refugee crises in the Middle East and elsewhere, armed conflict and financial, food, humanitarian and other crises continued to threaten international peace and development. The international refugee situation remained grim, with increasing numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons and rising xenophobia placing severe strain on the protection system. Consequently, the international community should focus first on peaceful settlement of disputes, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, through enhanced mediation and reconciliation efforts and conflict prevention mechanisms. It should also uphold the principles of international solidarity and burden sharing by taking effective measures to help developing countries and seeking a durable solution to the refugee problem while responding to humanitarian crises. Lastly, coordination among countries of origin, asylum and settlement of refugees as well as donor countries and relevant international institutions must be strengthened to enhance international refugee protection. Protection mechanisms should be objective and independent and avoid politicization.

57. China supported internal reform efforts in UNHCR and participated actively in international refugee protection. It continued to improve domestic legislation governing refugees; the recently implemented Law on Administration of the Entry and Exit of Aliens contained specific provisions on the matter. China was deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and deemed that the solution to the crisis lay in a political settlement. It had already provided over $17 million in humanitarian assistance to that country and its neighbours and stood ready to work with all parties to improve international protection for refuges and eliminate the root causes of the problem.

58. **Mr. Nardi** (Liechtenstein) said that the number of newly displaced persons in 2013 was higher than in any other year of the twenty-first century. Crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic had stretched the emergency response capacity of UNHCR and reflected the international community's limited ability to address the root causes of conflict. Without international consensus on conflict prevention and resolution, the

humanitarian landscape would become harder to manage.

59. Member States bore primary responsibility for assisting displaced persons. They should allow humanitarian personnel, supplies and equipment to reach emergency situations and should expedite procedures to allow those personnel to assist internally displaced persons. However, reports from the Syrian Arab Republic, where the most urgent humanitarian crisis of recent times was unfolding, suggested that such access was not being provided there.

60. His Government offered its condolences to the families of the two UNHCR staff members who had recently lost their lives in the line of duty. Humanitarian workers in general were at great personal risk in a context of persistent insecurity, although the number of security incidents affecting UNHCR staff had had fallen in 2012. States were responsible for the safety of humanitarian staff and should provide legal protection for them by ratifying the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and the Optional Protocol thereto.

61. His Government was concerned that many internally displaced children lacked access to education because of attacks on schools, and called on Member States to ensure the right of such children to education. Parties to conflicts should hold the perpetrators of human rights violations to account and end impunity. Objective judicial examinations of criminal responsibilities during conflicts would contribute to post-conflict reconciliation and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes.

62. **Mr. Lukyantsev** (Russian Federation) said that multilateral cooperation for the protection of refugees should be based on universal legal mechanisms, in particular the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol. The actions of UNHCR should be strictly humanitarian and apolitical. Its success depended on its ability to work with the international community to regulate crises; such efforts could not justify the arbitrary use of force against sovereign States, including forced regime change.

63. The current escalation of conflicts and increase in refugee numbers required stronger cooperation between the Office, United Nations bodies and States. Security should be ensured in refugee camps and the infiltration of combatants posing as asylum seekers should be prevented. More coordination was needed to ensure that camps did not become transit points for the rehabilitation or recruitment of combatants. His Government was concerned by the increasing misuse of asylum. An international definition of the status of asylum seekers was needed to preserve the institution. He welcomed the High Commissioner's statement on the eradication of statelessness, an area in which the Office should play a greater role, in particular in Latvia and Estonia, where many people had been stateless for decades.

64. His Government supported UNHCR in seeking long-term solutions to the questions of returnees, voluntary repatriation and migration. However, more balanced approaches to mass migration in emergency situations in third countries should be developed in conjunction with regional partners. His Government would continue its dialogue with UNHCR on the protection of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons, with a focus on increased cooperation on global issues where the Russian Federation was a donor and an equal partner.

65. *Ms. Dagher (Lebanon), Vice-Chair, took the chair.*

66. **Mr. El Hacen** (Mauritania) said that his Government reiterated its position on the Mauritanians who had been refugees in Senegal from 1989 to 2012. The last such refugees had been welcomed back to Mauritania at a March 2012 ceremony attended by the President of the Republic and the High Commissioner. The repatriation had been based on a tripartite agreement between UNHCR and the Governments of Mauritania and Senegal. His Government had opted for reconciliation and the inclusion of all its citizens.

67. **Mr. Tafrov** (Bulgaria) said that the international community was responsible for addressing the human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. By 2014, another 2 million Syrians would be refugees, with 2 million more internally displaced. His Government was facing an increasing flow of refugees at its borders. It was grateful for the international support it had received, would work with the international community to accommodate those refugees, and requested more assistance to meet the demands of asylum seekers.

68. Since December 2012, his Government had contributed hundreds of thousands of leva to Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and the destitute population in the Syrian Arab Republic through UNHCR, the World Food Programme and the United

Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and thousands of tetanus and diphtheria vaccinations to Syrian refugees in Jordan.

69. His Government's capacity to shelter refugees was overstretched. Recently, 8,800 people had applied for refugee status in Bulgaria and by the end of 2013 16,000 people were expected to seek asylum. The temporary accommodation centres were full. His Government was looking for more facilities and funding and was working to enhance administrative capacity by cooperating with stakeholders and making use of technical and expert assistance. It had adopted an action plan with a view to preparing a joint estimate of expenses; reallocating budgetary resources; requesting allocations through the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; updating State emergency response and crisis management plans; and conducting bilateral dialogues with Turkey and Greece to manage the refugee flow. It was cooperating with UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund and civil society. The support of the European Union was essential to the protection of refugees in Bulgaria.

70. **Ms. Bocoum** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that refugees had started leaving Côte d'Ivoire in recent years, particularly since the crisis following the 2010 presidential elections. At the end of that year, 300,000 Ivorians had been living in other countries in West Africa, while up to a million had been internally displaced and 700,000 had been stateless. Her Government had therefore made every effort to allow those affected to return and to eradicate statelessness. The President of Côte d'Ivoire had visited refugee host countries and the areas where internally displaced persons were residing, in order to persuade them to return home. Reintegration programmes had been implemented and cooperation with UNHCR and other organizations had been improved.

71. Since May 2011, 230,000 refugees had re-entered the country, mostly through the UNHCR repatriation framework. They received assistance with reintegration and were not harassed by her Government or by their neighbours. Internally displaced persons had returned to their homes, where they were assisted by the Government, local communities and the rehabilitation programmes of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

72. Legal steps had been taken to eradicate statelessness. Special procedures for birth registration and the issuing of identity documents had allowed 100,000 children to attend school, while 40,000 people had benefited from naturalization cards. All those who had resided in Côte d'Ivoire since before 1960 and their descendants, and all those born in the country before 1972, could now acquire Ivorian nationality, as could anyone marrying an Ivorian who made a declaration to that effect within three months of the wedding.

73. Her Government had offered those Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire who were affected by the cessation clause the chance to stay either as Liberian nationals under the Economic Community of West African States framework for the free movement of persons and rights of residence and establishment or by taking Ivorian nationality. In September 2013, her Government had ratified the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.

74. Although reforms in recent years had rendered the management of UNHCR more transparent and the international community had broadened its mandate, it did not receive enough resources to meet its needs, in particular with regard to the reintegration or local integration of refugees in Africa for whom cessation clauses had come into force.

75. **Mr. Grant** (Canada) said that in 2012 his Government had reformed its asylum system to make it faster and fairer and to improve its integrity, including through the removal of those asylum seekers deemed not to need protection. States should combat human smuggling, which endangered the lives of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and undermined support for refugee protection. His Government would prevent human smugglers from abusing its immigration system and would reduce the attractiveness of smuggling.

76. States should protect individuals fearing persecution in their countries of origin under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol. His Government was committed to the promotion of freedom of religion or belief, condemned the abuse of the human rights of the people of Rakhine State, Burma, and called on all sides to reach a solution. It was concerned by reports of forced

conversion and persecution of religious communities in the Syrian Arabic Republic, including Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. It condemned the widespread child, early and forced marriages among Syrian refugees, the intercommunal violence in Burma which had forced thousands to flee their homes, the conflict between rebel and Government forces in Sudan, which had forced thousands to flee to South Sudan and Ethiopia, and the high levels of rape reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Sahel.

77. The deteriorating situation in the Syrian Arab Republic had resulted in the targeting of civilians and denial of access to humanitarian aid, in violation of international law. His Government asked all parties to the conflict to stop targeting civilians and protected persons and to respect international law and urged the Syrian Government to help expand humanitarian and emergency efforts. Sustainable solutions which upheld human rights must be found.

78. The crises of 2013 had demonstrated the perils facing displaced persons and the importance of ensuring that humanitarian assistance reached those in need. Humanitarian actors should therefore not be targeted and medical and humanitarian personnel, facilities and transport should be protected.

79. **Mr. Milabi** (South Africa) said that his Government had adopted a rights-based approach to refugees and was therefore alarmed by the assertion in the report that the protection of asylum seekers remained a challenge. It was committed to the free movement of people. Refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa awaiting the determination of their status enjoyed freedom of movement and had access to jobs and basic services. Asylum seekers could work and study while awaiting finalization of their applications.

80. The international community should meet the challenges faced by refugees, in particular gender-based violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS. He agreed with the recommendation in the report that HIV-related issues should be part of contingency and response plans.

81. At the regional level, his Government was working with UNHCR and other countries to manage mixed migration and conclude bilateral agreements on those asylum seekers who transited through many safe countries in search of protection. It would seek assistance with the development of biometric registration systems enabling data sharing among countries, thus enabling persons born as refugees to acquire citizenship, in particular during cessation periods.

82. Ideally, countries of origin should create conditions conducive to the voluntary return of refugees. His Government also encouraged local integration and third-country resettlement for refugees with multiple nationalities.

83. **Mr. Kihurani** (Kenya) said that in 2012 the number of refugees in Africa had increased to 2.8 million people, half a million of whom were in Kenya. While UNHCR had continued to deliver humanitarian assistance, the growing numbers of refugees were placing its financial and human resources under huge strain and limiting the capacity to address the root causes of conflict. Despite the gap between needs and resources, however, UNHCR had continued to explore opportunities to find a durable solution to the refugee problem.

84. The influx of refugees from Somalia into Kenya had started with the 1991 collapse of the Somali Government and had increased following the 2011 drought and famine in the Horn of Africa. Kenya was currently hosting the highest number of Somali refugees in the world, estimated at over 1 million. Somali refugees in Kenya far outnumbered those from other countries. His Government did not have the capacity to host them and they adversely impacted the country's political, security, socioeconomic and demographic dynamics. The refugee camps were vulnerable to infiltration by Al-Shabaab operatives and criminals and posed a security threat to the region; the attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi in September 2013 had been planned from such a camp. The camps also damaged the environment and increased competition for scarce resources, leading to conflict with host communities.

85. The peace process based on the Somalia End of Transition Roadmap, however, had resulted in a new constitution and parliament and successful presidential elections, while military operations by the Somali National Security Forces and the African Union Mission in Somalia had improved stability, enabled his Government to focus on reconstruction and nation building, and reduced piracy.

86. Somali refugees living abroad now needed to return to the country to contribute to economic and

social progress. With the skills acquired in Kenya, repatriation would allow returning refugees to help reconstruction by participating in decision-making to enhance peace, security and prosperity. An estimated 80,000 refugees had already returned home from the Kenyan camps.

87. His Government was committed to its international obligations related to refugees and was mindful of the mandate given to UNHCR to facilitate their voluntary repatriation and reintegration under General Assembly resolution 428 (V) of 14 December 1950. It was engaged in consultations with the Government of Somalia and UNHCR with a view to concluding a tripartite agreement on the repatriation of Somali refugees, scheduled for signature in November 2013.

88. **Mr. Gaspar Martins** (Angola) said that his Government was aligning its legislation on the right to asylum with the strategic priorities of UNHCR, with a view to defining the procedures for granting refugee status in Angola; establishing a mechanism for coordination among national agencies involved in granting asylum; and defining the roles of those agencies to make the process more efficient. A preliminary draft law on the right to asylum and refugee status defined all refugee status procedures in compliance with international instruments.

89. The status of the many Angolan refugees living abroad following the conflict, which had ended in 2002, was being reviewed on the basis of the Statute of UNHCR, the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. His Government was committed to its discussions with host countries regarding Angolans who had ceased to hold refugee status in 2012 but had not returned, and to the preservation of those Angolans' conditions. Tripartite meetings between his Government, UNHCR and the Governments of Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia had been held in July and August 2013 with a view to allowing Angolan refugees in those countries to return. His Government had asked the South African Government not to apply the cessation clause to Angolans in South Africa until December 2013. On World Refugee Day 2013, it had agreed with the Zambian Government on the number of Angolan refugees allowed to stay in Zambia as a result of local integration. The last Angolan refugees had returned from Botswana in November 2013. His Government reiterated its appeal to host countries regarding the deadlines for the regularization of the immigration status of Angolan refugees and thanked those countries for their dignified treatment of those refugees.

90. **Mr. Elbahi** (Sudan) said that his country remained committed to the provisions of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and was compelled by its ancient culture and customs to respect guests in the country and provide them with food, shelter and stability; it had been receiving large numbers of refugees from neighbouring countries for many decades. It had also established a national Commission on Refugees in 1968, which worked in collaboration with UNHCR and set a leading example in the field of refugee services.

91. Natural disasters and internal conflicts in recent decades had increased the numbers of Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries and internally displaced persons. The Government of Sudan had been endeavouring to tackle those issues, for example by enacting national legislation in line with the relevant international and regional conventions. It had also established a transitional authority in the Darfur region, which had made considerable progress towards restoring stability and reducing violence in Darfur and the Blue Nile and South Kordofan states, enabling thousands of refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes through comprehensive voluntary repatriation programmes. The Government had moved from temporary to durable solutions, for example by reclaiming additional land for resettlement in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan states and increasing the height of the Roseires dam. A number of agreements had also been signed with the Government of South Sudan and the two presidents had recently exchanged visits, which had reinforced efforts to achieve stability and address the situation of refugees and displaced persons. His delegation was firmly committed to cooperating with UNHCR and the wider international community through partnerships based on burden-sharing.

92. Developing and less developed States should be granted debt relief, sanctions unilaterally imposed on some of them should be lifted and restrictions on their exports should be removed to enable them to fulfil their national obligations related to refugees, displaced persons and development.

93. **Ms. Oh** Hyunjoo (Republic of Korea) said that UNHCR should focus on its core mandate of protecting refugees and other people of concern, in particular the principle of non-refoulement, which she urged States and UNHCR to uphold. Her Government was concerned by the occurrence of forced repatriation in most regions in 2012 and the risk of refoulement in the case of refugees and asylum seekers from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

94. Although UNHCR had given high priority to the strengthening of its partnerships with non-governmental organizations and development agencies, unprecedented humanitarian situations such as that in the Syrian Arab Republic had shown that room for improvement remained. More structured partnerships with its implementing partners, through which 60 per cent of its operations were channelled, were essential to ensuring transparency and accountability.

95. Her Government had recently decided to provide $18 million to Afghan refugees through UNHCR from 2013 to 2015. At national level, a July 2013 law required that basic social services should be provided to asylum seekers, a refugee division had been created within the Ministry of Justice and a centre for refugee assistance had been constructed.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.